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ON PAGE 1-D

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MIHAILOVICH

MILT COPULOS

State shuns heroic ally

The recent release of previously classified documents from the top-secret World War II Office of Strategic Services, coupled with startling revelations from abroad, cast new light on one of the war's oldest controversies, and yield important insights into one of the Soviet Union's earliest and most successful disinformation campaigns.

Information contained in these documents now makes it clear that the leader of Yugoslavia's nationalist forces, Gen. Draza Mihailovich, was the victim of an active campaign of subversion conducted by James Klugman, a highly placed Communist agent in British intelligence and close associate of master spy Kim Philby. So successful was Klugman's effort that it continues to have foreign policy implications to this day.

Efforts are under way to correct the historical record. But the U.S. foreign service establishment is reluctant to acknowledge what is known today, because it doesn't want to offend the government of Yugoslavia, one of the few Communist regimes not under the Kremlin's thumb.

The tragic story of Gen. Mihailovich began when a group of Yugoslav generals, incensed at their nation's signing of the Axis Pact, overthrew Prince Regent Paul, and placed the teen-aged King Peter on the throne. Crying betrayal, Hitler ordered his generals to send 33 crack divisions into the nation and force it into submission. He also ordered massive bombing of Belgrade, Yugoslavia's capital, despite the fact that as an "open city" it was supposed to be immune from attack. Twenty thousand died in the air raids.

Unable to mobilize, the Yugoslav Army quickly disintegrated before the German assault. But the nation offered stiffer resistance than the Wehrmacht anticipated, under the leadership of a formerly obscure colonel named Draza Mihailovich.

On hearing of the initial German attack, Col. Mihailovich gathered what forces he could, along with a few pieces of artillery and a few tanks, and led his ragged force to a mountain redoubt.

To his surprise, first hundreds, then thousands, and tens of thousands of former soldiers, peasants, and others who wanted to resist the Nazi invaders joined the trek to the mountains. They brought whatever weapons and supplies they could — often World War I rifles and a little goat cheese. But it didn't matter; all they wanted was to fight the Germans.

What the Yugoslav nationalists lacked in material, they more than made up for with ingenuity. They would hollow out lumps of coal, fill them with explosives, and sneak them into the coal bins on Nazi locomotives. They would loosen railroad ties to cause derailments, and no German patrol with less than full-squad strength could expect to return to its base safely if it ventured into the night.

Moreover, these actions were taken in the face of the harshest reprisals imposed by the Nazis anywhere up to that time. For every German soldier killed, 100 Yugoslavs were executed. In one instance, after some 70 soldiers had died in an engagement, the local Nazi commander emptied a local high school and killed all the students in order to meet his quota of 7,000 executions.

News of the Mihailovich resistance was needed tonic to the Allies. At the time, France already had fallen and was under the rule of the quisling Petain regime; Britain was fighting a desperate battle for its own survival; and the United States had not even entered the war.

There was, however, a dark cloud hanging over the Yugoslav patriot's future. Intelligence reports from Yugoslavia began to suggest that Gen. Mihailovich might have been collaborating with his nation's German occupiers.

Meanwhile, Communist partisans under Marshal Tito, after initially sitting out the German invasion, and even helping local Nazi commanders identify guerrillas working with Gen. Mihailovich, suddenly declared war on Germany after Hitler invaded Russia. Rather than concentrating their efforts on the Germans, however, they spent most of their time attacking nationalist forces under Gen. Mihailovich. Still, reports of these actions never seemed to reach Allied headquarters, and, in fact, Tito's forces were credited at times with actions against the Germans which were carried out by nationalist forces.

These confused signals led U.S. Gen. "Wild Bill" Donovan to send an agent into Yugoslavia, even though intelligence-gathering there was under British operational control.

What agent George Muslin found during his eight months with the Mihailovich forces was a poorly supplied, almost desperate band of guerrillas who nonetheless had been able to wage an effective campaign against the Germans. Moreover, they had rescued many U.S. fliers who had been shot down over Yugoslavia returning from bombing raids, and were getting no response on requests for aid in evacuating them.

What Mr. Muslin and the nationalists did not know, however, was that

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